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SMITH HEMPSTONE

## A likely successor

**N**ow that Max Kampelman is on his way to Geneva for the nuclear disarmament talks with the Russians, Vernon A. Walters — Dick, to his friends — is the leading candidate to succeed Jeane Kirkpatrick as American ambassador to the United Nations.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick and the New Right like Gen. Walters because he is more interested in the workings of *realpolitik* than in human rights. Secretary of State George Shultz likes him because Gen. Walters has proved both loyal and discreet in his job as ambassador-at-large (and because, since Gen. Walters lacks political ambitions, Mr. Shultz believes he can control him in a way he could not Mrs. Kirkpatrick).

President Ronald Reagan likes him because Gen. Walters can say "yes, sir" in eight languages.

Liberals do not like Gen. Walters. They regard him as a polyglot bubble-head with a background in the arms trade and an affinity for

Smith Hempstone, editor-in-chief of The Washington Times, is a nationally syndicated columnist.



Gen. Vernon A. Walters

dictators, an unprincipled fixer who wormed his way from private to lieutenant general (and to deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford) by guile and flattery.

Others perhaps less than enthusiastic about the 69-year-old former intelligence operative include former U.S. Information Agency chief Frank Shakespeare, Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Hanford Dole, former Republican senator from Illinois Chuck Percy, and U.S. Ambassadors Griffith Galbraith (France), Maxwell Rabb (Italy), John Gavin (Mexico) and William Wilson (The Vatican). All of them have been reported in the running for the U.N. post.

However one feels about Dick Walters — this scribbler first met Walters 20 years ago during his second tour as military attache at the American Embassy in Brazil — he is a most unusual man: a Roman Catholic and a lifelong bachelor, with a mind unsullied by attendance at a college or university.

Dick Walters, who was born in New York City, stands 6-foot-3, weighs 210 pounds and has the affable, somewhat ruffled air of a successful insurance executive, which is exactly what his father was. He

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was educated at the St. Louis Gonzaga school in Paris and at Stonyhurst, one of the two great Catholic public (private) schools in England. He enlisted in the U.S. Army, was commissioned in 1941 and saw action in North Africa and Italy.

While he was to serve more than 30 years before his retirement from the Army in 1972, those World War II shots were pretty much the last Dick Walters was to hear fired in anger. With his appointment as military attache in Brazil in 1945 — in addition to Portuguese, he speaks fluent French, Spanish, German, Italian, Dutch, and Russian — Gen. Walters was launched on his Scarlet Pimpernel career, a curious meld of intelligence operative, adviser, and interpreter to a series of high-ranking American officials.

He accompanied Gov. Averell Harriman to Korea in 1950 and to Iran the following year. He showed up with President Harry Truman for that historic confrontation with Gen. Douglas MacArthur. He served as an aide to Secretary of State George Marshall (another soldier in mufti). He was with President Dwight D. Eisenhower when the late Gary Powers was shot down in his U-2 spy plane, causing the cancellation of a summit meeting. When a Venezuelan mob stoned Richard Nixon's car in 1958, Gen. Walters was sitting next to the vice president.

But perhaps he is best remembered for his role as Henry Kissinger's "travel agent" during the early stages of the negotiations with the North Vietnamese, at which time Gen. Walters was the military attache at the American Embassy in Paris.

Gen. Walters devised the scheme under which Mr. Kissinger (then a bachelor) had a well-publicized date in Washington on a Friday evening, jumped on Air Force One that night, was met Saturday morning at an obscure French military airfield by Gen. Walters, spirited into Paris for talks with the North Vietnamese and then showed up back at his desk in Washington Monday morning with the press none the wiser. It worked 15 times before the ploy was discovered.

Appointed by President Nixon to be deputy director of the CIA, Gen. Walters played a key role in the Watergate scandal. On instructions from the White House, he cautioned the Federal Bureau of Investigation that its investigation might compromise U.S. foreign intelligence operations. When he soon discovered this was not the case, he informed the White House he would resign if further attempts were made to misuse the intelligence agency.

He spent the years 1977-81 writing his memoirs, *Silent Mission*, and working as a consultant to one firm engaged in arms deals with Morocco (he knows King Hassan well) and to another involved in oil exploration in Guatemala.

As ambassador-at-large, Gen. Walters since 1981 has been involved in dozens of delicate (and largely unpublicized) missions in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. He has traveled perhaps half a million air miles for Secretaries of State Alexander Haig and George Shultz, frequently by commercial aircraft and often under his own name. He can get away with it because he so much resembles, well, a slightly rumpled but highly successful insurance executive.

It also helps that, while he speaks eight languages, Gen. Walters knows how to keep his mouth shut in all of them.

Friends and foes alike would agree that Dick Walters would make an intriguing choice as Jeane Kirkpatrick's successor at the United Nations talk shop.